



The Dark Inside Her by the dark inside me

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Summary: Eleven's first day at Hawkins Middle goes horribly, horribly wrong. Shameless Mileven. Angsty what-if? oneshot based on 'Winter with Eleven'.

The Dark Inside Her

Folks who enjoy a little bit of misery with their breakfast may like this dark 'alternate ending' what-if? oneshot story.

Contains shameless Mileven.

This can be read immediately following chapter 7 of 'Winter with Eleven', or completely on its own.

Note - I don't own Stranger Things.

The Dark Inside Her

All in, all in, all in a day

All in, all in, all in

A day, it changes everything

- **Weight**, Isis

A quiet knock at El's bedroom door roused both her and Mike from a gentle snooze. "El? It's six-zero-zero AM. Six o'clock Monday morning. First day of school, remember? Come on out when you're both ready, but we need to be on the road by seven-one-five. Seven fifteen."

El blinked the gummy feeling out of her eyes, suddenly aware that Mike's hands were under her sweater, spontaneously cupping her breasts. She also felt the very distinct pressure of his morning wood against the junction of her thighs. Mike muttered as she moved drowsily against him, knowing that very soon they had to get up and face what lay ahead. His eyes fluttered open as she settled for a sensual good morning kiss instead of giving in to sheer instinct.

"Morning," he said, once they'd broken apart. He smiled sheepishly when he realized her hand was lightly caressing the bulge in his pajamas. She rubbed her socked toes gently along his leg.

"School today," El whispered. She looked apprehensive and a little bit sad.

Hopper threw another log on the fire, set the kettle to boil and

collapsed back into his chair by the dining table, trying his hardest not to think about what could be happening on the other side of El's bedroom door right now. *Hopefully nothing*. He'd felt uneasy about letting Wheeler stay over but knew that El needed all the support she could get leading up to her very first day in unfamiliar territory.

It also helped that whenever Mike stayed with Eleven, the nightmares came a lot less frequently.

The kettle whistled and Hopper shut it off, busying himself with his morning coffee and hot chocolates for the kids. El's bedroom door finally creaked open, and the two teens padded out holding hands. Hopper glanced at his daughter, then at Wheeler, then at their hands firmly clasped together, and calmly took a sip of his coffee. "Morning, kid. Wheeler. Ready for your big day?"

"Think so," El answered quietly.

"Morning Hop," Mike mumbled. He looked at his feet and shuffled nervously.

Hopper set his coffee down and indicated the two steaming mugs on the table. "Hot chocolate's up, and I'll fix us all breakfast in a minute. Take your time eating and getting ready. We're not leaving for a while yet but it's treacherous out there with the snowy conditions so I'm allowing for extra time." He looked at Mike again. "You still sure you want me to drop you at Will's on the way in?"

"It's probably better if I'm not seen getting out of your truck on El's first day at school," Mike replied.

Hop snorted. "Worried about your reputation?"

"I'm more worried about El," Mike shot back. "Bad enough having my *mom* fawning over us like we're about to get married. It would be unfair on El if the whole damn school jumped to conclusions too."

"Alright, suit yourself. But people are going to talk anyway. It's a small town." Hopper turned and walked back to the kitchen. "Cereal or Eggos?"

"Class? This is Jane. Jane Hopper. Chief Hopper's daughter," Mr. Clarke announced by way of introduction. "She's starting as a part-time student at Hawkins Middle, and will be joining us for classes every Monday and Thursday until the end of semester, so please make her feel welcome. Jane, we've arranged to sit you next to Michael Wheeler." He indicated the desk on Mike's left.

A low buzz rippled around the room. Some of the more well-connected kids sniggered, or hid smirks behind their hands or textbooks. Clearly the rumor mill about town had been churning much faster than anticipated. El could feel a number of eyes on her, but she carefully ignored them all as she started making her way over to her desk.

"Retarded *lovechild*," muttered the posh girl sitting next to Dustin. He turned and glared at her in shock.

Mike's look had changed to one of slight concern as El shrugged off her satchel and sat down next to him. She reached down to pull out her textbook and their eyes met for the briefest second. He jerked lightly as he felt her mind touch his. *It's okay Mike. Let the mouth breathers laugh. Love you.*

"Love you more," he stage-whispered, knowing she'd hear.

"Okay class, shall we commence our lesson then?" Mr. Clarke said briskly, turning to the blackboard. "We spoke about the phases of the Moon, and its effects on gravitational pull. Let's recap by focusing our attention on page 263, figure vii..."

The bell finally rang to signal the end of first period. There was a mad flurry of activity as everybody rushed to gather up their belongings and began filing out of the classroom in chaotic fashion. Eleven, who wasn't used to the routine at all, was much slower to react. Mike and Will stopped to give her a quick helping hand and together they started for the exit.

Mr. Clarke met the group at the door. "Boys? Max. Jane. A very brief word please? I'm not sure how much Chief Hopper has already said, but I want you to know that I'm grateful you've all agreed to take Jane under your wing for the two days a week she attends class." He

glanced between all six members of the party and focused on El. "Now Jane, I take it you've already met your tutor, whom you'll be working with every other day?"

El ducked her head and nodded shyly.

"Good!" Mr. Clarke replied enthusiastically. "I know it's going to be difficult adjusting to school life at first, so if you do feel overwhelmed, please feel free to use the AV room as your safe place." He dug a key out of his desk drawer and handed it to El.

"Thank you," she said quietly.

"You're welcome. Enjoy the rest of your day!" he answered cheerfully, and turned back to his desk as more students began filing into the room for second period.

Hopper turned the corner and strode straight into Coleman's office, ignoring the shrill protests of the two hawkish administration ladies as he passed by their desk. He sensed his already rotten mood was about to darken even further.

"Ah. Chief Hopper. Back so soon?" The principal fixed him with a stare from behind a desk littered with knick-knacks, and gestured him towards an empty chair. The two had already crossed paths earlier, when he'd introduced Hopper and Eleven to her new tutor before class.

Hopper eased himself into the chair, realizing that this was the very same one he'd sat in, the day a certain kid named Michael Wheeler had been catapulted into his life. He figured it was fate that had brought him all the way back again. "Yeah," he replied shortly.

Coleman leaned forward in his seat and steepled his hands. "Did Jane get to her first class okay?"

"I made sure she got there safely." He'd waited patiently off to the side, murmuring words of encouragement to El when she'd grasped the door handle with a trembling hand, peering apprehensively through the small window into the classroom, observing the tumult

within. He'd watched and listened through the doorway from his vantage point as Mr. Clarke made his introductory spiel, and he'd only turned to leave once El had settled herself safely into the seat next to Wheeler. But all he could think about as he'd walked away down the echoing corridor was the disconcerting way in which the class had reacted to her arrival.

Now Hopper's eyes scanned the room methodically, finally coming to rest on the principal himself. "You know, I saw how those kids responded to my daughter when she walked into their class just now," he continued, his voice cooling a few degrees. "It wasn't pretty. Seems there's already been a whole load of *talk* happening about the place. *We had a deal*, Russell."

The principal looked slightly taken aback. "Jim, I can assure you neither myself nor any of my senior staff have breached any of our agreements," he said evenly. "Other than maybe five people, there's no one on this campus who knows anything about Jane beyond the fact that she's your daughter. Possibly not even that much."

"Yeah? Well you better find and reel in whoever's going round spreading shit, because it sure ain't *fair* on a thirteen year old girl who's been through *a lot* of trauma in her short life so far," he snapped.

Coleman held his palms up in appeal. "Please. I'm *really* sorry to hear that, but I think you might be jumping at shadows. It'll most likely be one or two bad eggs influencing the behavior of the rest. We can't be responsible for parents talking around their kids, or kids talking outside of school. It's a small town, and no doubt me and my staff are not the only people you've spoken to about Jane."

Hopper looked away. For a moment he wished he'd picked a different cover story for him and El. He'd been so sure he could weather any gossip that came his way, but hadn't quite accounted for the effect it would have on her, or Wheeler, or any of their friends. Belatedly he realized Coleman's words were almost a mirror of what he'd said to Mike at breakfast that morning.

"If you're beginning to doubt my sincerity, Jim, you know we could have blown this whole thing wide open a year ago," Coleman

continued pointedly. He lowered his voice and leaned closer to Hopper. "We could have *easily* let the whole Will Byers saga spiral out of control after those lab spooks showed up and wrecked half my god damn school. But the mere fact you and I are sitting here having this chat right now is an indicator I'm still holding up my end of the bargain."

"You've got my thanks for that. But I *can't* just let you sit by and do nothing about this." Hopper sighed and scratched his beard. "My daughter... Jane... she's *not* like other thirteen year olds, Russell. You *don't* wanna find out what could happen if she gets pushed over the edge. You, and me, and her, we all don't wanna be back here in this office again a day or two from now trying to deal with the fallout if that *situation* arises." His tone took on an edge of desperation.

"Again I'm sorry, Jim," Coleman said firmly. "But the moment we make a big deal out of it to the entire faculty, Jane will suffer even worse taunting. Rumors have a short lifespan. Better to let them die out of their own accord than pour fuel on that fire by acknowledging them." He sat back in his chair and crossed his arms in finality.

Hopper's head was aching and he rubbed his temples in frustration to keep the dark thoughts at bay. "Well, then I guess the blood will be on *your* hands," he spat at the principal as he stood up to leave. There was nothing more he could do about it. He figured maybe he'd stop by Melvald's on the way back to the station, maybe chat with Joyce, maybe see if she had any insight for him.

A noticeable heaviness hung in the air as fifth period dragged on and on. The combination of mid-afternoon lethargy and midwinter blues was really making itself felt amongst the students in El's class.

El squirmed restlessly in her chair, not really listening as the math teacher droned endlessly on in the background. Geometry, probability, scatter plots. All kinds of boring stuff she sort of knew about, but didn't really care for right now. She risked a glance across the row at Max, whose head was propped up in one hand as she gazed disinterestedly off into space. El looked back down at her notebook, and sighed inaudibly as her mind flashed back to the previous Thursday's study session. The two girls had tried covering

almost the exact same topics that day, she recalled, and had found it extremely hard to concentrate, just like now.

She squirmed again and stretched her legs as another topic from last Thursday popped into her mind. One that was more than just a teeny bit naughty, and made her heart beat a little faster even as boredom threatened to overwhelm her. *Are you and Mike...?* Her thighs started tingling at all the delicious thoughts. *We're just fooling around.* She'd wanted to *fool around* with him when they'd woken up today, but Hopper had roused them for school before anything could happen.

El chewed on her lip, thinking furiously. If she remembered correctly, after fifth period came recess, which meant a chance to be alone with Mike! An idea formed in her mind and she started scribbling in her notebook, a warm flush spreading across her cheeks as she did, hoping no one else was looking at her right now.

One person had been, of course. Mike had given up on the math lesson the moment he'd sat down, and now he was as bored and listless as everyone else, looking forward for class to finish so he could be with his girlfriend again. Apart from a quick furtive cuddle as they'd sat together in the cafeteria at lunchtime and the brief interludes between periods, he and El had spent the entire day so far separated by one desk width. So painfully close, yet so far away, and unable to do anything about it except sneak cute looks at each other. He thought back to that morning when they'd woken up in her bed, and he still yearned desperately for her touch.

The teacher turned to write something on the blackboard, and in Mike's peripheral vision he saw a note suddenly appear on the edge of his desk. He fumbled to grab it, and his eyes widened when he surreptitiously unfolded it and read El's simple but compelling words.

Mike glanced to his right and their eyes met briefly in acknowledgment. He felt the hairs on the back of his neck tingle as El gave him one of her warm dimple-faced smiles, then they both settled back and waited for class to finish, their earlier boredom now replaced by a new and burning anticipation.

Finally after what seemed like a small eternity, the recess bell rang. Mike and El quickly stood up and nodded to each other

microscopically.

"Uhhh... we'll meet you guys in the AV room," Mike said to the others, quickly dropping the key on Dustin's desk as he and El quickly filed past.

Dustin looked up in confusion. "Wha..." he started to say, but the couple had already disappeared into the throng of kids leaving the room for recess. He glanced around at his other friends for support but found none. Will was studiously packing his books away, avoiding all eye contact. Max had a sly grin on her face as she looked at Lucas. Lucas had a resigned look on his face as he looked at Max. None of them seemed to be paying any more attention to El and Mike's sudden departure.

"Oh my god. Oh my god. *Oh my god.*" Dustin cradled his head in his hands as realization finally dawned on him.

Eleven excitedly led Mike down an endless maze of corridors, turning left here and right there with skilled grace, heading away from the more well-traversed areas of the school until they came upon a nondescript door set into the wall between two empty Home Economics classrooms.

"How... how did you even know how to get here?" he asked El wondrously as she steered him towards the door.

"Wandering the Upside Down," El answered him simply. She'd walked up and down every echoing corridor, opening countless doors, peering into every nook and cranny, all in her initial desperate quest to find a way to leave that horrible place. "After the Demogorgon. After Papa. After they *went away*... I hid... here for a while." For all she'd known at the time, the Demogorgon could easily have been one of many others lurking within the nightmare world. She hadn't been totally sure of Brenner's demise, either.

Mike looked around to make sure the corridor around them was totally deserted, then stopped in shock. They weren't alone after all. A boy he barely even knew was edging towards them with a disgusted look on his face.

"Hey, it's the Chief's *retard* kid!" he sneered at the couple. "And *frogface* too."

Mike held his hands out in a placating gesture, heart thumping as he tried his hardest not to bite back at the other boy's seething insults. "Hey. *Back off*, man. No need for that. It's her first day and I'm just showing her round school, alright?"

"Oh so you were gonna give her a tour of the *janitor's closet*? Nice try. Troy always said you were a creep." The boy edged even closer to the couple. "Word around the place is you and her hooked up at the Snow Ball. Looks like I caught you about to stick it in her again. At *school*, no less."

"*Shut the hell up!*" Mike yelled, panic rising in his chest. "I don't even know you!"

"Yeah? Well the whole school knows who *you* are," the other boy hissed. "King of the geeks, hanging out with zombie boy Will Byers and those other wastoids. And now here you are, recruiting yet another *loser* for your cause." He gestured wildly at El. "Everyone's saying Chief Hopper had a one-night stand with some woman thirteen years ago. While he was still *married*, even. And she had his secret lovechild, and never told him until recently. Then she went insane, they said. Kept retard girl here locked in a cupboard and screwed up *her* mind real good too."

Mike shot a fearful aside glance at his girlfriend, hoping like hell she would let him try and defuse the situation. He opened his mouth to say something, *anything* to placate her, but the look was already in Eleven's eyes.

A drop of red glistened under her nose.

Crack.

The bully howled in agony as a bone in his leg shattered, and collapsed to the ground in a sudden, wailing heap.

"***NOOOOOO!***" Mike screamed desperately. He turned to his left, but it was already way too late. There was a second sickening thud as he

felt and saw El hit the floor beside him.

When Principal Coleman, Hopper, and the medics showed up some time later, they found a barely coherent Mike sitting weakly against the wall, sobbing inconsolably and hugging his knees in shock. Lying in front of him were the crumpled forms of Eleven and the other kid.

Coleman hovered over them, mouth wide open in disbelief, as the medics started forward. Hopper knelt to scoop his unconscious daughter into his arms, holding her tightly, gently wiping the blood away from her ears and nose. "Oh, El. *El!* What have you done? We had a deal! *We had a deal!*" he cried in anguish, cradling her head in his hands.

El and Mike definitely do not deserve this, and it hurt way too much trying to write about the aftermath.

After countless revision attempts the tone of the ending still felt off-kilter, following way too soon on the heels of Hopper and Coleman's meeting and also seemed completely out of character for El and Mike, so when I picked up writing 'Winter with Eleven' again months later I abandoned it for being too tragic and miserable.

I incorporated some of the plot elements into Chapter 8/9/10 of that story, rewrote the narrative, and made Coleman and a couple of other characters more sympathetic in the process.